DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday 27 October 2005 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT:

Councillor K F M Leadbeater (Chairman)
Councillor J A Kite (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor A D Allen
Councillor R G A Dunn
Councillor A R Martin
Councillor B E Read
Councillor Mrs P A Thurlow

140. APOLOジES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor K F M Leadbeater submitted an apology for his late arrival.

141. COUNCILLOR J A KITE IN THE CHAIR

142. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor A D Allen declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 14 – Powder Mill Lane – Re-naming of sections due to stopping-up orders, as she is a Parish Councillor for Wilmington.

143. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 22 September 2005 be confirmed.

144. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman reported that submission of the following urgent report had been authorised. He intended to consider the report later in the meeting:

POLICE FORCE AMALGAMATIONS AND MERGERS – RESPONSE TO KENT POLICE AND KENT POLICE AUTHORITY CONSULTATION.

145. CABINET ADVISORY PANEL - 18 OCTOBER 2005

The Cabinet received the minutes of the Cabinet Advisory Panel held on 18 October 2005 and took note of the Panel’s views throughout the meeting.

146. REFERENCE FROM COMMITTEESS

REFERENCE FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, MEETING 14 SEPTEMBER 2005 – ISSUES RELATING TO OUT-OF-HOURS SERVICE / NOISE NUISANCE.
The report asked Members to consider the request of the Scrutiny Committee to reintroduce the out-of-hours call-out service, as soon as circumstances permitted and in the light of resources available.

The Cabinet Advisory Panel had expressed its support for the Scrutiny Committee’s resolution, but were frustrated by the lack of a clear route and a timetable which would lead to the re-instatement of the out-of-hours service. Members had requested further information about the action which officers were taking to enable the service to be re-instated, to ensure Cabinet was well informed. An addendum bringing together this information was supplied to all Members of the Council.

The Strategic Director confirmed that the out-of-hours service had been suspended because of concerns about the health and safety of officers delivering the service and not because of financial pressures.

Three Environmental Health Officers were due to take up employment with the Council. This would alleviate the problems associated with the delivery of the service. The out-of-hours service was a planned response, which came from the collation of evidence and the building-up of a case and was not, in general, an on-demand service. An exception to this would involve car or burglar alarms continually sounding.

The Managing Director confirmed that it was the responsibility of the report author to clear any reference report with the Chairman of the parent committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That it be noted that the out-of-hours service was suspended due to concerns about the health and safety of officers delivering the service and not because of financial pressures.

2. That the recruitment of new Environmental Health Officers be welcomed.

3. That the Leader of the Council write to the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee explaining the progress made in terms of the delivery of the service by the recruitment of the Environmental Health Officers.

4. That a report on the re-establishment of the out-of-hours service be submitted to Cabinet by April 2006.

(At this point Councillor K F M Leadbeater assumed the Chair)

147. CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA

The Chairman proposed a change in the order of the agenda.
RESOLVED:

That Agenda Item 9 – Hackney Carriage Fare Tariffs be taken as the next item.

148. HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARE TARIFFS

Members were advised of the current proposals for an increase in the hackney carriage fare tariffs.

As requested by the Cabinet Advisory Panel, the letters received from Mr Peeke and Mr Jones had been circulated to Cabinet Members as supplementary information. Furthermore the Cabinet report had been circulated to Mr Peeke, Mr Jones, Mr Lafevre and the other members of the trade who had made representations.

This was a very complex issue and Members debated the tariff proposals in detail. Any increase in fare tariffs will affect, in particular, those on low and fixed incomes, as well as those living in rural areas.

The proposal submitted by the Enforcement and Regulatory Services was the Cabinet’s preferred option. However, Members felt strongly that the licensed Dartford hackney carriage drivers should be consulted and asked whether they preferred the Council’s proposal or the one submitted by Mr Peeke and Mr Jones.

Due to the winding up of the Dartford Taxi Association and the timescales involved, it was agreed that the best way of conducting this consultation was for the Licensing Assistant to send each licensed Dartford hackney carriage driver two ballot papers. One would ask which of the two proposals was preferred; the other would ask if the respondent was a member of, or would like to be a member of, the Dartford Taxi Association. It was agreed that the result of the ballot would be used as a guide, when the decision on the tariff level was made.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet express preference for the proposal by the Enforcement and Regulatory Services (Appendix E to the report).

2. That the Licensing Assistant send to each licensed Dartford hackney carriage driver two ballot papers, one asking which of the two proposals was preferred and the other asking if the respondent is a member of, or would like to be a member of, the Dartford Taxi Association.

3. That a report on the result of the ballot be submitted to the Cabinet meeting on 24 November 2005 and that this report also be circulated to the trade.
4 That the Council endeavour to implement the fare increase by January 2006.

5 That Cabinet agree, in principal, to the Enforcement and Regulatory Services Section, in consultation with the Deputy Leader, conducting a tariff review over the next six months.

149. REFERENCE FROM THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL: QUALITY SERVICES COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2004 - 2005

The report reviewed the activities detailed in the Annual Report of the Quality Services Committee for the 2004 – 2005 municipal year and requested Cabinet in particular:

(i) to consider actions taken as a result of the recommendations made by the Tourism and Heritage Working Group, which were subsequently endorsed by Cabinet on 25 November 2005.

(ii) to note that the final report from the Development Including Executive and Affordable Housing Working Group is still outstanding.

The report also requested Members to review the frequency of meetings of the Quality Services Committee.

The Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Tourism and Visitor Strategy confirmed that the actions taken as a result of the recommendations made by the Tourism and Heritage Working Group were being implemented, although not as promptly as had first been thought possible. One reason for this was the development and associated works being undertaken in the town centre.

The Cabinet expressed concern that, after considerable time and resources had been invested in the Development Including Executive and Affordable Housing Working Group, the final report, which will provide guidance to Cabinet on the development of housing policy, had yet to be submitted by the Lead Member.

Members discussed the frequency of the Quality Services Committee meetings and were informed that two scheduled meetings had been cancelled since September 2004. Members also considered the Work Programme of the Quality Services Committee and noted that the work on Supported Housing had slipped a cycle, as a result of the staffing difficulties in Housing.

RESOLVED:

1 That the Annual Report of the Quality Services Committee for the 2004-05 municipal year be noted.

2 That actions taken as a result of recommendations made by the Tourism and Heritage Working Group be noted, and be referred to the Quality Services Committee.
3 That the Quality Services Committee be asked to address the absence of a final report from the Development Including Executive and Affordable Housing Working Group and aim to consider the report at its meeting on 25 January 2006.

4 That no change in the frequency of the Quality Services Committee meetings be proposed.

5 That the work programme of the Quality Services Committee be endorsed and that an element of slippage on the Supported Housing Issues be noted.

6 That the intention for each topic under the Housing Section on the work programme to slip a cycle be noted.

150. POLICE FORCE ALMAGAMATIONS AND Mergers-RESPONSE TO KENT POLICE AND KENT POLICE AUTHORITY

In accordance with Standing Order 48 (4)(b), the Chairman decided that this report should be considered as an urgent item at the meeting, in order that Members have the opportunity to consider the matter and make any further response prior to the Home Secretary’s deadline of 31 October 2005.

The report brought to Members’ attention the Home Office review of the number of police forces and the potential for the Kent Police Force to merge with another force/s. The report advised Members of the views of Kent Police and the Kent Police Authority and sought endorsement of the response to the consultation, sent by the Strategic Director on behalf of the Council.

This response had emphasized the Council’s strong support of the views of Kent Police and the Kent Police Authority and continued the Council’s view that there needs to remain a strong element of local policing, rooted in and accountable to the community. The possible financial implications of any amalgamations and mergers were also highlighted.

RESOLVED:

That the response to the Kent Police and the Kent Police Authority consultation, sent by the Strategic Director on behalf of the Council, be endorsed.

151. CONSULTATION DOCUMENT : SOUTH EAST PLAN : EMPLOYMENT, HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN KENT

Members were presented with a summary of the main points of the consultation document, published by Kent County Council and Medway Council, on the planning advice to be given to the South East England Regional Assembly, together with a proposed response.
The Cabinet Advisory Panel had welcomed the report which set out key issues for Dartford. They had also raised further issues and a supplementary report had been circulated, suggesting further comments to be made in response to the Consultation. Members concurred with the recommendations made by the Cabinet Advisory Panel.

RESOLVED:

1. That Kent County Council and Medway Council be thanked for the opportunity to comment on the consultation document.

2. That the comments set out in the emboldened text of the report, including the additional comments and amendments suggested by the Cabinet Advisory Panel, be submitted as the formal response of the Council to the consultation document (attached for ease of reference as an Appendix to these minutes).

3. That the last sentence of paragraph 3.37 be replaced with “The South Eastern England Regional Assembly must face up to the reality that some major developments will not take place without significant funding contributions from government for infrastructure”.

152. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The report considered the national picture for local government finance and commented on the likely grant settlement for 2006/07.

The draft letter to the Minister for Local Government was circulated to Members.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted.

2. That, subject to the correction of the typing error on page two (“or” to be amended to “for” in third bullet point), the letter to the Minister for Local Government, (attached for ease of reference as an Appendix to these minutes) be noted.

153. CONCESSIONARY FARES

The report considered the operational and financial implications for the Council of the Government’s announcement that, from April 2006, the current statutory half-fare scheme will become a free scheme.

The Head of Finance and Resources had informed the Cabinet Advisory Panel that the third option in paragraph 3.7 (to adopt the statutory scheme, but offer as an alternative the current county-wide half-fare scheme) was no longer felt to be feasible.
The Cabinet Advisory Panel had been informed that Kent County Council supported and administered the county-wide scheme and members of the Panel had endorsed the recommendation in the report.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to full re-imbursement of additional costs by the Government, the Council adopts a free county-wide concessionary fare scheme.

154. DARTFORD CRICKET CLUB

Members were asked to approve a capital grant to Dartford Cricket Club, to allow it to improve its facilities and the security of its pavilion and to bring the facilities to a standard which will allow its youth development opportunities to continue.

The Cabinet Advisory Panel had endorsed the recommendations in the report.

RESOLVED:

1 That a capital grant of £30,000, to assist Dartford Cricket Club in bringing its pavilion facilities to a standard that ensures the Club’s continued youth development work and its efforts to raise the profile of cricket in the Borough, be approved.

2 That the Regeneration Director, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for grants, be authorised to agree terms for the capital grant.

3 That officers be authorised to actively assist Dartford Cricket Club in developing a bid to external funding organisations, to ensure that the Club has the full range of facilities needed to continue providing youth development opportunities.

155. PRINCES PARK STADIUM PROGRESS REPORT

The report advised Members of the actions taken to enable a start on site to be made in November 2005.

The Deputy Leader informed Members that it might be possible to bring forward the projected date for the start of work on site.

Members were also informed that an agreement had been signed to enable a webcam to be situated at the site.

RESOLVED:

That the current position, and the proposed start date for construction works, be noted.
156. **J & E HALLS BOWLS CLUB - INVESTIGATION INTO RELOCATION TO STONE LODGE**

Members were updated on the present position and were presented with a feasibility study into the provision of a new bowling green; pavilion and associated facilities at Stone Lodge. The report sought approval for action to be taken to bring forward this new project.

The Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Arts and Sports, and the Project Director, confirmed that, at meetings on 24 October 2005, representatives of Stone Lodge Indoor Bowls Club and Halls Bowls Club had respectively; both welcomed the proposals in the report.

Members agreed that the Council had been fortunate to procure the services of MAKE Architects, who had expressed their pleasure at working with Dartford Borough Council on the Judokwai project, and that the Council should be proud of what it had achieved.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the results of the feasibility study be noted.
2. That the Project Director be authorised to proceed with the project at an estimated cost not exceeding that contained in the confidential appendix to the report.
3. That authority be granted for the Council to enter into separate contracts with the existing design team and the cost consultants for the Judokwai project and that the Project Director, in consultation with the Head of Legal Services, agree terms for these contracts.
4. That the Project Director, in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, be authorised to submit a planning application, once the design works had been completed.

157. **POWDER MILL LANE - RE-NAMING OF SECTIONS DUE TO STOPPING UP ORDERS**

The report updated Members on the outcome of discussions with the management of the Questor Industrial Estate and the Kent Fire and Rescue Service regarding the implementation of the stopping-up order and presented proposals for re-naming sections of Powder Mill Lane.

The Cabinet Advisory Panel had welcomed the historical background to option (a) in paragraph 3.8 of the report and had recommended retaining the name Powder Mill Lane for the residential Hawley Road end, and re-naming the Questor and Darenth Road end section as North Powder Mill Lane.
Cabinet Members concurred with the reasoning of the Cabinet Advisory Panel although, due to possible complications with alphabetical listings, it was agreed that re-naming the Questor and Darenth Road end section as Powder Mill Lane North will be more appropriate.

RESOLVED:

That the name Powder Mill Lane be retained for the residential Hawley Road end and that the Questor and Darenth Road end section be re-named Powder Mill Lane North.

158. KENT AND MEDWAY STRUCTURE PLAN - CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS

The report informed Members of the content of the proposed modifications to the Kent and Medway Structure Plan and provided a basis for deciding whether any representations should be made.

The Cabinet Advisory Panel had endorsed the recommendations in the report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report be noted.

2. That Cabinet respond to Kent County Council on the basis set out in the main body of the report (attached for ease of reference as an Appendix to these minutes).

159. PREPARATION OF THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR DARTFORD : SUBMISSION DRAFT STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The report informed Members of the results of the consultation on the submission statement of Community Involvement and recommended changes to be put to the Planning Inspectorate.

The Cabinet Advisory Panel had endorsed the recommendations in the report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposed changes set out in Appendix B to the report be agreed and be put to the Planning Inspectorate, and its content be recommended to the General Assembly of the Council on 5 December 2005 for approval.

2. That delegated approval be granted to the Policy Manager/Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Portfolio Member, to respond to, or clarify, any matters raised by the examination inspector.
160. OAKFIELD LANE CHILDREN’S CENTRE DARTFORD

Members were asked to approve the Council taking a ground lease from Kent County Council, on behalf of Surestart-Dartford, at Oakfield Lane Infants’ School, Dartford.

The Cabinet Advisory Panel had expressed concern over the possible implications associated with Kent County Council now being responsible for allocating budgets, although it was agreed that Surestart–Dartford at Oakfield Lane Infants’ School, Dartford will be a valuable asset to the Council.

Members concurred with the recommendations of the Cabinet Advisory Panel.

RESOLVED:

1. That the taking a ground lease at Oakfield Lane Infants’ School, Dartford on behalf of Surestart-Dartford be agreed.

2. That authority be delegated to the Head of Finance and Resources, in consultation with the Project Director and the Head of Legal Services, to negotiate and agree lease terms.

3. That the efforts of Councillors A D Allen and D E Hunnisett in making this project a success be welcomed.

161. THE A2/A282 DARTFORD IMPROVEMENT (M25 JUNCTION 2 IMPROVEMENTS) COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER PART 2 (MP NO 41) 2005

Members were asked to declare the parcel of land (Plot 2/2 [0.29 hectare]) surplus to the Council’s requirements and to approve the exchange of the parcel of land (Plot 2/2 [0.29 hectare]) for the lands (Plots 4/1 [0.08 hectare] and 4/2 [0.05 hectare]).

The Cabinet Advisory Panel had endorsed the recommendations of the report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the parcel of land (Plot 2/2 [0.29 hectare]), as identified by a black verge on the plan attached as Appendix A to the report, forming part of Darenth Country Park east of Green Street Green Road and on the north of the A2 Trunk Road, be declared surplus to the Council’s requirements as it falls within the A2/A282 (M25 Junction 2) Improvement Compulsory Purchase Order Part 2 (MP No 41) 2005.

2. That the designation of the land as public open space be noted and any representations be reported back to a future Cabinet meeting.
3 That delegated authority be granted to the Head of Finance and Resources, in consultation with the Project Director, the Head of Legal Services and the Regeneration Director, to agree terms for the acquisition of exchange land, two parcels of land (Plot 4/1 [0.8 hectare] and 4/2 [0.05 hectare]) as shown by a thick green verge on the plan attached as Appendix B to the report.

162. REMOVAL OF RESIDENTIAL PARKING SCHEMES AT HOPE COTTAGES AND GORE ROAD

The report advised Members of the result of the consultation undertaken with the residents of Hope Cottages and Gore Road relating to the continuation of residents’ parking schemes in their respective roads. In accordance with the wishes of the majority of residents in Hope Cottages and Gore Road, Members were asked to approve the termination of the residents’ parking schemes currently in operation, by obtaining and implementing the appropriate Traffic Regulation Orders.

The Cabinet Advisory Panel had been read an extract from a letter of appreciation, received from a resident, of the Enforcement and Regulatory Services Manager’s personal intervention in resolving this matter. The Ward Members for Bean and Darenth, Councillors I D Armit and D A Hammock, had also informed the Advisory Panel of the considerable work undertaken by the Enforcement and Regulatory Services Manager in bringing this report to Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

1 That the termination of the residents’ parking schemes currently in operation at Hope Cottages, Bean and Gore Road, Darenth, by obtaining and implementing the appropriate Traffic Regulation Orders, be approved.

2 That the Enforcement and Regulatory Services Manager be thanked for his efforts in resolving this matter.

163. THE ORCHARD THEATRE BUDGET MONITORING

Members were updated on financial performance against budget to the end of July for 2005/06 for The Orchard Theatre.

The Cabinet Advisory Panel had endorsed the recommendations in the report.

RESOLVED:

1 That the financial performance, compared to budget to date in 2005/06, for The Orchard Theatre, be noted.

2 That the early indication of the end-of-year budgetary position be noted.
164. ENVIRONMENTAL PROMOTION ACTIVITIES

The report updated Members on activities undertaken this year to promote a range of energy efficiency, environmental awareness and waste reduction schemes, both internally and across the Borough. The report also recommended actions that the Council could undertake to raise environmental awareness, increase take-up of Council-funded schemes and promote the Council as a community leader in this area.

The Cabinet Advisory Panel had endorsed the recommendations in the report.

The Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Environmental Health informed Members that the Council will be placing particular emphasis on working with, and encouraging, primary schools to become involved with environmental issues. Research indicated that involving the drama and arts community in primary schools was very successful. It was anticipated that outline plans and proposals will be submitted to a Cabinet meeting in the near future.

RESOLVED:

1 That the environmental promotion activities, undertaken to date and planned in the current financial year 2005/06, be noted.

2 That the proposal to introduce an environmental statement for Dartford Borough Council to show a commitment to protect and enhance the environment be noted.

165. MEETING OF DARTFORD ASSOCIATION OF PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS HELD ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2005

Members were presented with the notes of the meeting of the Dartford Association of Parish and Town Councils held on 21 September 2005.

Members concurred with the Cabinet Advisory Panel’s recommendations that Cabinet request that a progress report, from the Senior Engineer, Kent Highways, on Highways Communication Links (Minute 16) be submitted to the next meeting of the Joint Transportation Board, and that copies of the full report on the Darent Valley Walk feasibility study (Minute 22) be sent to the Chairmen of Wilmington and Darenth Parish Councils.

RESOLVED:

1 That the notes of the meeting of the Dartford Association of Parish and Town Councils, held on 19 September 2005, be noted.

2 That the Senior Engineer, Kent Highways, be requested to submit a progress report on Highways Communications Links to the next meeting of the Joint Transportation Board.
3 That the Chairmen of Wilmington and Darenth Parish Councils be sent copies of the full report on the Darent Valley Walk feasibility study.

166. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information.

No members of the press or public were present during the discussion of the following items of business

167. REPORT OF THE NORTH KENT INVESTMENT UPDATE REVIEW WORKING GROUP MEETING HELD ON 6 OCTOBER 2005 EXEMPT CATEGORY SO46 (1) (B) ANNEX 1, PARAGRAPH 9

Members were presented with the unconfirmed notes of the meeting of the North Kent Investment Update Review Working Group held on 6 October 2005.

The Lead Member of the North Kent Investment Update Review Working Group expressed disappointment that members of the Labour Party had not engaged in the Working Group’s meetings and hoped that they would participate fully in the future, as the Working Group welcomed their input.

RESOLVED:

1 That progress to date on prioritising bids for submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister be noted

2 That the Lead Member, members of the Working Group and officers be thanked for the significant progress made to date.

168. LAND ADJACENT TO 11 DARENTH ROAD DARTFORD EXEMPT CATEGORY SO46 (1) (B) ANNEX 1, PARAGRAPH 9

The report outlined the bids received for the land which was formerly used for public car parking in association with the adjacent Darenth Road car park, which is no longer in existence due to Fastrack.

The Cabinet Advisory Panel had endorsed the recommendation in the report.

RESOLVED:

That the land as shown on the plan attached as Appendix A to the report be leased on the terms attached as Appendix B to the report or on such other terms as may be agreed by the Head of Finance and Resources, in consultation with the Project Director and the Head of Legal Services.
169. **PRINCES PARK STADIUM PROGRESS REPORT - EXEMPT APPENDIX EXEMPT CATEGORY SO46 (1) (B) ANNEX 1, PARAGRAPH 9**

RESOLVED:

That the appendix be noted, following discussion of the main report (minute 155).

170. **J & E HALLS BOWLS CLUB - INVESTIGATION INTO RELOCATION TO STONE LODGE - EXEMPT APPENDIX EXEMPT CATEGORY SO46 (1) (B) ANNEX 1, PARAGRAPH 9**

RESOLVED:

That the appendix be noted, following discussion of the main report (minute 156).

171. **OAKFIELD LANE CHILDREN'S CENTRE DARTFORD - EXEMPT APPENDIX EXEMPT CATEGORY SO46 (1) (B) ANNEX 1 PARAGRAPH 9**

RESOLVED:

That the appendix be noted, following discussion of the main report (minute 160).

172. **THE ORCHARD THEATRE BUDGET MONITORING - EXEMPT APPENDIX EXEMPT CATEGORY SO46 (1) (B) ANNEX 1, PARAGRAPH 7**

RESOLVED:

That the appendix be noted, following discussion of the main report (minute 163).

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

Councillor K F M Leadbeater
CHAIRMAN
Dear Mr Martin

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT SOUTH EAST PLAN: EMPLOYMENT, HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN KENT

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the consultation document. Cabinet has considered the document and the Council’s formal response is set out below:

Locations for new employment

The Council’s response on the Draft South East Plan Part 1 was that:

‘The successful regeneration of Dartford is dependent on achieving a satisfactory balance between housing and employment growth. Otherwise Dartford is in danger of becoming a dormitory suburb of London. Subsequent drafts of the South East Plan must provide sufficient emphasis on the need for economic growth, the infrastructure required to support it, and the sectors from which growth is expected to be achieved.’

The overall approach set out in the consultation document is consistent with the Council’s approach and is supported.

The Council welcomes the inclusion of Higher and Further Education in the Employment section as education plays an important role in regeneration and the creation of vibrant communities.

The ‘Infrastructure and community services’ section of the Consultation Document at paragraph 3.44 identifies important Further and Higher education projects across the County and in Medway, and includes ‘expanding North West Kent College on the former University of Greenwich campus at Dartford’ and ‘a
potential new Higher and Further Education site in Thameside, possibly at Ebbsfleet.

The North West Kent College has a programme of further and higher education courses. It is also a partner college of the University of Greenwich. The Amended Second Deposit Draft Local Plan Review policy GB9 (Oakfield Lane Campus) is supportive of further expansion at the site subject to development satisfying certain criteria. The Council regards the site as an important Higher and Further Education facility that will play an important role in the regeneration of the area. The employment section identifies Kent Thameside as a developing new location for Higher and Further Education and this is supported. However, it omits the North West Kent College. This is inconsistent. Given the important role Higher and Further Education can play in regeneration and the creation of vibrant communities, and that regeneration in Dartford is to be employment led, the important role that the North West Kent College can play should be recognised in the employment section.

There are emerging further education opportunities in the Borough. Darent Valley Hospital, for example has aspirations to become a teaching hospital, while Ebbsfleet will provide a location of international stature and importance, with a significant business community located around the station, and first class rail connections to London and North Kent. It is ideally suited for a new Higher Education Institution serving the needs of the North Kent area, and driving the expanding economy of Kent Thameside.

In the light of these and the existing presence of an expanding North West Kent College, Dartford should be identified as a critically important location for the expansion of Higher and Further Education in order to drive economic growth.

There is no reference to the role of ports. Considering the range and number of ports in North Kent, this is surprising. The important economic role of ports in North Kent should be emphasised and Dart Terminal, London (Thames Europort) should be included.

The Council considers that the additional 58,000 jobs in Kent Thames Gateway for the period 2006-2026 is essential in order to reduce Dartford’s current dependency on London for employment. The Council supports the target figure.

Housing numbers

This Council’s response to SEERA on the overall Kent Thames Gateway housing figure was:

“The Kent Thames Gateway Steering Group (KTGSG), of which Dartford was a member, felt Options 1 and 2 to be unrealistic and would change the policy of regeneration in Kent Thameside to one of major greenfield development. It therefore recommended Option 3 as the preferred scale of growth in the sub-
region. The Council considers that there is insufficient capacity within the Borough to support development beyond the level envisaged in Option 3. It therefore prefers Option 3 because it is based on known site capacities and will not require development in the Green Belt. The other Options will require Greenfield/Green Belt development.

The Council does not support options that require development of Dartford’s Green Belt. It should be noted that, even under Option 3, it is not expected that Dartford will be able to sustain the currently high planned levels of growth throughout the plan period. However, it is anticipated that, as Dartford approaches its development capacity, other parts of Kent Thames Gateway will continue to release housing sites. Option 3 has been preferred on this basis.”

The Kent Thames Gateway figure of 48,000 is in line with the Kent Thames Gateway Option 3 figure preferred by this Council.

Whilst the Dartford housing figure of 15,500 is welcomed it should be noted that Dartford’s proposed housing allocation could only be met if relatively high density development can be sustained over the lifetime of the plan, if large brownfield sites are released when anticipated, and if infrastructure is available when needed to serve development. Recent indications suggest that this will be challenging. The proposed housing target should therefore be regarded as an absolute maximum.

The Rest of Kent sub-region includes a housing target for the Borough’s rural area south of the A2 of 230. Most of the rural area lies within the Green Belt. There are limited opportunities for residential development within the villages not subject to Green Belt restrictions. Completion rates in the rural area are averaging just over 4 dwellings per annum. If this rate continues then an additional 80-90 dwellings could be delivered over the period 2006 to 2026. Land at Axton Chase School is identified in the Local Plan Review as having a site capacity of 75 units based on the provision of family housing using the existing school’s footprint. The Council is concerned that the scale of housing proposed whilst seeming to be modest over the 20 year period could nevertheless require inappropriately high density development within the villages or necessitate the release of land from the Green Belt to facilitate its delivery. The Council seeks a reduction in the rural housing target.

Infrastructure and community services

The Council is concerned that the list of critical infrastructure projects that accompany the plan will be treated as a finite list. A full assessment of the complete range of strategic infrastructure needed to deliver the scale of growth envisaged has not been presented. In addition, other projects may be identified during the period of the South East Plan as being necessary. It is important therefore that the advice to SEERA makes it clear that the list of critical
infrastructure projects is the best assessment to date and is not necessarily the final list.

The Council is concerned that the consultation document does not include any environmental infrastructure. This is a serious omission. The green environment is crucial to the success of the regeneration of this area. It is imperative that the scale of development proposed for Kent Thames Gateway in general and Dartford in particular, is accompanied by timely, quality greenspace infrastructure.

Most of the Borough’s water is supplied by Thames Water. The Council notes that the consultation document identifies investment by Thames Water in water supply and mains in the Dartford area as being critical to maintaining water supply to existing and new dwellings. The Council considers that it is important that this investment should also take full account of the scale of employment growth proposed for the area.
The Council considers that investment in waste water infrastructure is equally important and must be planned as an integral part of new growth and development.

The consultation document refers to the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment which is being undertaken for Kent Thameside (at paragraph 3.13). This is a crucial piece of work which will provide the basis for Environment Agency advice to the Council on strategic development patterns in areas of risk, and will inform the content of the Council’s emerging Local Development Framework. The Council welcomes the emphasis placed on flood risk assessment and the evidence base this will provide to guide Environment Agency inputs to the planning process.

The Council supports the following projects in principle:
- North Kent line, Dartford – Slade Green: improvement to four tracks;
- The Fastrack network; and
- The Bean interchange on the A2

The Council considers that the Pepper Hill interchange will need to be considered for additional, non-programmed, improvements as recognised in the Highway Agency’s A2/M2 Route Management Strategy. The scheme will need to be included in the schedule of critical infrastructure.

The Council considers that the performance of the London Road corridor and St. Clements Way are critical to the regeneration of Dartford because otherwise there will be insufficient capacity to cope with further major developments and little opportunity to provide priority for Fastrack and other public transport services.

The Council supports the principle of improved rail access to wharves, provided that this does not adversely affect the capacity for high frequency passenger services on the North Kent Line. It should be noted that studies have shown that rail to Thames Europort is not feasible.
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The Council considers that it is important that Ebbsfleet is served by Crossrail services in the longer term and that this aspiration should be included in the list submitted to the Regional Assembly.

The Council’s response to SEERA on the Lower Thames Crossing was:

"The Lower Thames Crossing has the potential to deliver major reductions in traffic on the A2 corridor east of the M25 and on the Dartford Crossing, depending on the nature of the crossing and how it is connected into the wider strategic highway network on both sides of the Thames. The A2 and M25 corridors that serve the Borough would then be much better placed to deal with the forecast growth in traffic as a result of the significant levels of development proposed for the area. At present, the Highways Agency is expressing grave concern at the ability of the strategic network to cope, even with a strong package of more sustainable alternatives in place. Provision of a Lower Thames Crossing, which includes a strategic road link, could therefore have a major local impact in providing the required capacity headroom within the strategic network. It is considered that an assessment of the case for the Lower Thames Crossing is urgently required, and should precede any decisions about the capacity of North Kent to accept the high levels of development postulated in the draft Plan."

The Council’s position regarding the urgent need for an assessment of the case for the Lower Thames Crossing remains unchanged.

The proposal that planning permission should only be granted once clear funding commitments have been secured for all the necessary infrastructure may be inappropriate in the case of complex and expensive sites with a lead-in time of three to five years and a project delivery period of perhaps ten years. The South East England Regional Assembly must face up to the reality that some major developments will not take place without significant funding contributions from government for infrastructure.

Please contact Mr Buckley on 01322-343202 if you wish to discuss any of these comments.

Yours sincerely,

Rob Scott
Regeneration Director
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Councillor Kenneth Leadbeater  
Leader of the Council  
Conservative Member for Heath Ward

2 November 2005

Mr P Woolas MP  
Minister for Local Government  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Woolas,

Revenue Support Grant Settlement 2006/7

The Council submitted a detailed response to the consultation on proposals for changes to the Formula Grant Distribution System. That was essentially a technical response to the specific options put forward for consultation.

That response included reference to the under-funding by the Government for district council services. For those districts in the South East, particularly areas of growth like Dartford, the problem is acute.

When the Dartford Cabinet considered its Medium Term Financial Plan, my Cabinet colleagues asked me to write to you personally, to seek your help in assuring a fair deal for the residents of Dartford in the forthcoming finance settlement.

The Government has made much of the increased funding to local government in recent years. Funding for local government overall, as measured solely against the retail price index, has increased, but this has been directed primarily at key Government priorities of education and social services. For district councils generally, and those in the South East in particular, the picture is completely different, with Councils having to contend with growth in economic activity and population, additional responsibilities and inflation nearer 5%.

The 2004/5 settlement was complicated by the change of funding of benefits, but the Council received additional grant of less than 3%. Our unavoidable increased costs were far greater than our increased income.

In the 2005/6 settlement, the Council received additional grant of 3% (£189,000). We generated a further £77,000 from increased tax base, giving a total additional income of £256,000, but we had additional unavoidable expenditure of £919,000.

To reduce our net expenditure and avoid a large increase in council tax in 2005/6, the Council undertook a fundamental review of all budgets. We made efficiency savings of over £800,000 and other savings, to reduce our net budget by £1.3m.
Despite this, we face similar difficulties for the 2006/7 budget with a potential budget increase of £1.2m, which implies an increase in council tax of 41%. The Council does not want to increase council tax above the level of inflation and will review budgets rigorously to identify further efficiencies, but we cannot save £1.2m without directly affecting services to the public.

The following are just some of the budget pressures which the Council has absorbed in the past couple of years and again this coming year:

- Staff pay award
- Increased employer pension costs
- Significant additional costs for raising levels of recycling
- New licensing regime
- Local Development Framework
- Ending of targeted Government Grant e.g. Town Centre Warden, Police Community Support Officers
- Increased waste collection costs
- Reduced net income from Government changes to benefit subsidy
- Local government inflation at 5% each year
- Civil Contingencies Act
- Substantial reduction in income from land charges
- Concessionary fares
- New food safety regulations
- General growth pressures of more houses, more roads and more litter

These additional costs far exceed additional income.

In addition to this, Dartford is at the heart of the Thames Gateway. The growth pressure will undoubtedly increase and the formula grant system is very slow to react to expansion. Our response to formula grant consultation made some proposals for special assistance to growth areas and I ask that you consider them carefully. This is especially true for growth in business, where the council has been particularly successful, only to find it is penalised for its success in the Local Authority Business Growth Incentive formula. New business generates more activity and more costs, but this is not properly recognised in the present grant system.

The Council was assessed as “good” from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, with a score which ranked it at 30 out of all district councils in the country. In our Audit Commission comparison group, we have the third lowest council tax. We are a well managed, well run council.

Government grant in recent years has been targeted at education, social services and authorities in the Midlands and the North. Most, if not all, district authorities in Kent are at the grant “floor” and receive the lowest level of grant increase each year. I am not asking for special treatment, but just for Dartford (and South East districts) to be treated fairly.

Further damage to this important tier of government by further under-funding will see targets on anti social behaviour, sport and healthy living, recycling and economic growth begin to falter. With specific government help, the area is poised for growth,
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but is still fragile. We can achieve, and possibly exceed expectations, but we need your help and support.

Yours sincerely

Kenneth Leadbeater
Leader of the Council
Dear Ms Florey

Dartford Borough Council’s Formal Response to the Kent and Medway Structure Plan Proposed Modifications

Dartford Borough Council’s Cabinet considered the Kent and Medway Structure Plan Proposed Modifications at their meeting on the evening of 27 October 2005.

Given that the deadline for comments on the Modifications was before 5 PM on the 27 October I had agreed with you that I would forward a copy of the Cabinet report to you following the meeting of the Council’s Cabinet Advisory Panel on 18 October 2005. This I did on 19 October noting that the report contained our draft comments on the Modifications, subject to ratification by the Council’s Cabinet. You kindly confirmed that our draft comments had been received within the deadline.

Following the Cabinet meeting on 27 October, and as a result of there having been no discussion on the item, I confirmed that the content of the Cabinet report constituted the Council’s formal response on the Modifications.

I have now been asked to confirm this in the form of a letter. I therefore submit the following comments as the Council’s formal response to the Kent and Medway Structure Plan Proposed Modifications:

The following discussion deals first with Panel recommendations that were not accepted by the Councils, then those accepted in part by the Councils, and then those accepted, resulting in modifications. Cross references to the related part of the Proposed Modifications document is included.
Of the Panel's recommendations that were not accepted by Kent and Medway Councils, only one relates specifically to Dartford Borough. The Panel recommended that the second paragraph of Policy SS8, which proposes the exclusion of Eastern Quarry from the Green Belt, with new boundaries to be defined in the Dartford Borough Plan, be deleted. The Councils do not agree with this proposed deletion, arguing that: "The exclusion of Eastern Quarry from the Green Belt was determined through the 1996 Structure Plan but new boundaries have yet to be determined through an adopted local plan / local development document. Pending this, retention of the reference to revision of the Green Belt in this area is appropriate." This approach (Kent and Medway Council's response to R9.2) merits support as it confirms the Council's own planning policy stance. (see also the comment relating to MOD 2.8 below)

Of the Panel's recommendations that were accepted in part, only one is of particular note for the Borough. This is Policy HP3 which, when first drafted, indicated a percentage target for residential development on previously developed land for each District. Dartford had a target of 35% with an asterisk which confirmed that: "Policy target includes former mineral workings and other damaged land that falls outside the definition of previously developed land within the terms of PPG3". The Panel recommended that the target for the use of previously developed land in HP3 should be re-based to correspond with the PPG3 Annex C definition and exclude other former mineral working sites, and specify an overall county target only. The Councils have agreed to amend the policy to show only a county wide target, but plan to show District totals within the text and refer to the important role of other former mineral working sites in the strategy especially within Kent Thameside. This approach (MOD 7.3) merits support as it confirms the Council's own planning policy stance.

Of the Panel’s recommendations that were accepted and resulted in modifications, the majority are generally helpful in clarifying the overall policy intentions of the Plan. A number of these are of particular note for Dartford. These are discussed in the order in which they appear in the Plan.

The proposed pre-EIP change to Policy SS8 (Extent of the Metropolitan Green Belt in Kent) has been confirmed by MOD 2.8. This refers to the addition of "and St Clement’s Valley" after the reference to Eastern Quarry and the reference to new boundaries being defined through the Dartford Local Development Framework. The Council supported this proposed change when commenting on the Proposed Pre-EIP Changes document (Minute 80 refers). This approach (MOD 2.8) merits support as it confirms the Council's own planning policy stance.

Policy NK1: This policy sets out the strategic intention for urban growth in Dartford and Gravesesham, and lists the main locations where growth is expected and the nature of development anticipated. Eight separate modifications are proposed. One relates specifically to Gravesesham (MOD 3.8). Three of the proposed modifications (MODS 3.2, 3.4 and 3.5) clarify the policy's application to "strategic development locations" rather than strategic developments. Two
clarify the approach to development at Eastern Quarry and Swanscombe Peninsula – that it should be “integrated with a new and improved public transport network” (MODS 3.6 and 3.7). One strengthens the reference to the Green Grid being “part of a comprehensive greenspace strategy” providing “a network of open land and green spaces” (MOD 3.3). One expands the first paragraph of NK1 stating that development additionally needs to be related specifically to the phasing of the provision of “flood defences, and water resources and wastewater treatment infrastructure” (MOD 3.1). The changes to Policy NK1 (MODS 3.1 to 3.7) clarify the policy approach and merit support.

MOD 6.1 provides for the introduction of a new “Policy FPO: Land, Workforce, Education and Skills” which is designed to reflect the objective for a balance between jobs and the workforce, including a reduction over time in the volume of out commuting (particularly from North Kent), and to recognise the importance of skills and education to achieving economic objectives. This approach (MOD 6.1) merits support as it reflects the Council’s own planning policy stance that regeneration in the Borough should achieve a balance between housing and employment, and recognises the link between education and economic development.

MOD 8.4 and MOD 8.7 include amendments to the tables of transport schemes, which now include the timing and purpose of those schemes. Specific changes/additions in Table TP4 and subject of MOD 8.4 include track widening between Slade Green and Dartford on the North Kent Line post-2016, better interchange between Ebbsfleet and Northfleet stations by 2009 and extension of Crossrail services to Ebbsfleet from 2013. MOD 8.7 includes the proposed London Road/St Clements Way junction improvement by 2009 (Table TP7). These amendments in MOD 8.4 and MOD 8.7 merit support.

MOD 8.15 which refers to Policy TP22: Kent Ports deletes the reference to “At Thames Europort redevelopment of the port for other land uses will be supported”. This has the effect of supporting employment led regeneration objectives and contributing to greater employment choice. The Local Plan Review policy approach to Thames Europort has already been raised as an issue in preparatory work for the Council’s Local Development Framework. This approach (MOD 8.15) merits support as it reflects the importance which the Council attaches to the economic potential of Thames Europort.

Proposed modification of Policy HP1 amends the housing provision figures to relate only to the period 2001 to 2016. This reflects the fact that the South East Plan will be the policy document that will contain housing provision figures for the period beyond 2016. There is no change to the figures for Dartford (12,400 for the 2001-2016 period).

In the “Managing Our National Resources: Climate Change – Energy Production – Water Resources – Flood Risk” chapter, the new policy suggested at Pre EIP stage has been confirmed. The Council’s comments at Deposit stage advocated the inclusion of a new policy addressing energy conservation. In the
interests of pursuing more sustainable development, this new policy wording (MOD 9.1) merits support.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Siân Phillips
Planning Policy Manager